



News Release

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Contact:
Stephen P. McDonald
Office of Public Information
801-538-7099

Utahns Spent \$393 Million on Obesity Last Year

(Salt Lake City, UT) – A paper recently published in the national journal *Obesity Research* estimates that Utah spent approximately \$393 million on obesity-related medical expenditures in 2003. The national estimate was \$75 billion. The paper, written by researchers at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and RTI International, estimates that Utah spent \$71 million in Medicaid money on obesity-related medical costs, or 9 percent of the State's total Medicaid expenditures.

A 2003 Utah Department of Health (UDOH) survey revealed that 15 percent, or 238,067, of Utah adults are obese – approximately the populations of Salt Lake City and Provo combined. And, even more alarming, almost 54 percent of Utahns are obese or overweight. Overweight is defined as having a body mass index (BMI) of 25 to 29 and obese is defined as having a BMI of 30 or greater.

State officials at the UDOH are fighting the high cost of obesity in Utah. The Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention Program (HDSPP) is taking the lead to implement a statewide plan with community partners to make policy and environmental changes in worksites, schools, and communities that provide more opportunities for physical activity and good nutrition. The HDSPP is funded by a combination of state and federal monies, including a grant from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The UDOH's Arthritis, Asthma, Check Your Health, and Diabetes Programs are partnering with HDSPP to inform the public and health providers about ways to improve physical activity and nutrition and reduce obesity prevalence among Utahns.

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“By focusing on obesity as a major risk factor for chronic diseases such as heart disease, diabetes, stroke, cancer and osteoarthritis, we hope to save lives and reduce long-term disabilities,” said Ladene Larsen, Bureau of Health Promotion Director, UDOH.

“Although Utahns on Medicaid are more likely to be obese than the rest of the population, the numbers in this report rely on the extrapolation of survey data to the statewide population and do not include analysis of any actual claims,” cautions Dr. Scott Williams, Executive Director, UDOH. “Reducing the rates of obesity and the related chronic diseases should be priorities for all Utahns. A combination of daily physical activity and smart food choices is still the most effective approach we know of to control the direct and indirect costs of treating these illnesses.”

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The mission of the Utah Department of Health is to protect the public's health through preventing avoidable illness, injury, disability and premature death; assuring access to affordable, quality health care; and promoting healthy lifestyles.